October 1950

SFC Vallejos was an asset of the 25th Headquarters Division, even though assigned to the 89th Medium Tank Battalion. His war stories placed him all over the map. Having been trained in the fields of reconnaissance, commando and rifleman, Vallejos was called upon repeatedly for "special assignments". This one is known as the Battle of the Apple Orchard.

"They took me off the tank cause they needed me (to help) the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade and the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat team (187 RCT). They were surrounded – completely. They had a whole damn army up against them…and they had no ammo. G-2 got ahold of me and said, 'I got a nice job for you Sgt 'Valley Joe', you gotta take a truckload full of ammo (to the 187th). I asked, 'Do I have to?' He says, 'It's an order.' 'Yes sir…' I says,' well can I pick my gunner?' Cause your 6x6's (6 by) have the turret for a .50 caliber. 'Yes.' He says. I picked (ol Kelly), he was an ex-sniper that wound up getting his fingers all screwed up. I says, 'that's the guy I want, cause all he's gonna use is his thumbs. So, we took off; late in the afternoon; I had 180 miles to travel. Here I am at 3am in the morning, and that 6 by was haulin cans man!"

The truck they charged up the hill with had special flags on it. They saw a few enemy in those early hours, but they weren't fired on.

"We kept on truckin. We got there and the captain (that met us) was so happy, he had tears in his eyes, ready to start runnin down his cheeks. He gave me a big hug and says, 'Thank God, you made it!' His guys saw me commin and they were ready to unload. (The Capt) says, 'I wish you'd stay the night…' which meant he was very short on sharpshooters. I was a sniper. I guess G-2 told him."

Once the 187th was able to fight their way off that hill, Vallejos headed back to D Company, 89th MTB, and settled back in as gunner for Nordstrom. Task Force Dolvin II (of which they were part of) proceeded from the newly captured North Korean capital, Pyongyang, towards Chongju. On the way they met with continued resistance.

"We were moving north pretty fast, and we were ahead of everybody else; that's the way Nordstrom wanted it…reminded me a lot of old bad ass Patton…world's greatest hero, didn't care who he killed. We were parked for 3 days at the Taenyong River because the bridge was out. Across it was a bunch of N. Koreans and Chinese. I'd lob one over there now and then, just to make sure they weren't gonna come across."

Well, a few enemies did come across the river near Vallejos' tank and were captured. Orders were, "no prisoners" so Vallejos shoved them off on another tank for them to kill the captives. Vallejos, however, was ordered to 'interrogate' one prisoner – which turned into torture involving ants and a reed straw. No intelligence of any worth was acquired.

After 3 days a pontoon bridge was completed so they could get across. On the other side were 5 or 6 little straw huts…

"And what the hell does Nordstrom tell me? To kill this one lady who was pregnant…she tried to be friendly (but) Nordstrom ordered me to kill her, get the baby out, cut its head off and give it to him. I should of killed that SOB right there, for makin me do that (to her), and to me. God, damn I wanted to kill him!
Nordstrom would say, 'You do this and that's an order cause she's an informant; collecting information."

Nordstrom ordered Vallejos and a couple of other corporals to reconnoiter about 4 miles ahead. In short order they radioed back to say they spotted about 10 – 12 enemy, plus an orphanage of kids, ranging in age from about 14 down to babies.

"One of the corporals that was with me called in and told Nordstrom what was going on. (Nordstrom) says, 'Kill um all – everybody!' The damn corporal was surprised and said, "It's an orphanage! Bunch of kids!' That's when Nordstrom blew his stack and told um, 'You get that god damn savage you got there on lead, and you tell him I want all them goddamn chinks DEAD! I want you to bring me a couple of heads of them kids…and that's an order! So <u>you</u> 'kids' have a job to do, get it done!' "

"Fuck…what the hell we gonna do? The corporal told (Nordstrom), 'I refuse to do that to babies sir!' 'Corporal that's a direct order!' 'I don't give a damn what kind of order you give – I refuse to kill babies!' "

"Shit. It was all left to me. The other corporal took off, I don't know where the hell he went."

Nordstrom demanded 'trophies' to prove the job was done - body parts from the slaughtered children.

"(Then) I heard a bunch of bugles…oh shit, I didn't know what that meant. So, with the god damn bag ¼ full of paraphernalia – I took off. I took the fuckin shitload to Nordstrom; it was just about daylight…what that SOB did…I couldn't believe what (more) that monster did. He shot the corporal…both of them – back of the head! For disobeying a direct order in the face of the 'enemy'."

"Everybody was pissed off, cause he did what he did. I pulled my pistol out…and emptied it right between that SOB's legs. Scared the living shit outta him. He actually got down on his fuckin knees, pleaded for mercy. God, I came close to killin that SOB. Everybody in D Company had absolutely no respect (for him) after that."

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"I knew that's why I went and had 11 children, to try and make up…ohh…I don't know. I never told Nellie (his first wife yet to come) anything about my combat experiences. She had her own damn problems."

"I don't wanna talk anymore, this is the worst part. I've got a horrible, horrible headache. I took 3 Tylenol a while ago…don't phase me at all."

Robert Vallejos still had more horrors to address. I had not yet become his last wife, but I was beginning to see he really needed me.

"You're the only one I've…freely talked (to) about the war…you're my light and savior, sweetheart. I love you."

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When I googled Nordstrom's name later at home, I found an article, in part titled," Chapter Four - Tank Action at Chongju ". It was an account based upon an interview with Lt. Francis G. Nordstrom and the 25th Infantry Division War Diaries unit report: 89th Med. Tank Battalion, Oct 1950. I printed it out for Bob to read the following day. Bob's ire rose with his blood pressure.

"Yes, it's a good report, but when he started to say that he had his hatch door open, and these big shells were a foot away from his head and all this crap. I'm gonna tell you one thing about that SOB…"

Bob railed at various elements of the report, barely finishing one thought before launching into another.

"I'm the (gunner) that killed all them (4 Chinese) tanks, <u>plus</u> 50 Australians, because <u>he</u> ordered it!"

"Whoa, whoa, what?! You didn't…" I sputtered.

"The hell I didn't. He says that he, at night, turned the headlights on, and for everybody to turn their headlights on to see where the enemy was; it wasn't the enemy, it was the Royal Australian Battalion. I says, 'We got troops in there.' He says, 'There's no troops it's the enemy.' (So) he told me to use the 50-caliber machine gun that I used the trigger on, he wanted me to spray in this area…at night. I killed over 50, well over 50 Aussies!"

The Nordstrom interview described this event occurred at 2100 hrs. on October 29th.

When morning came there were 25 to 30 <u>*bodies*</u> around the 1st Platoon's tanks, some within a few feet of the vehicles. At 1000 hrs the column got underway again and reached Chongju that afternoon. This was the objective, and here the task force broke up."

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Discussion that followed the article concluded with: "No reason is given to account for the halt of the task force on the night of 29 October. Men tire and machines exhaust fuel, but a pursuit must be pressed night and day. The enemy must be denied all chances to rally, reconstitute his lines or recover his balance."

<u>*The reason for the 12-hour delay was so they could clean up their slaughtered brothers….*</u>